

Paper presentation:

From Participatory Culture to Prosumer Capitalism: Imaginaries of Transparency in the Age of Corporate Surveillance

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In the complex ecosystem where community and technology intersect, social media data is playing a key role in the transition of social media platforms from a logic of sociability to one of commerce. Implicit in this transition are the issues of surveillance and transparency, as what started out as collective, user-centred social media platforms have become profit-driven organisations required to create commercial returns for investors. This contribution investigates the political economy of social media data, looking at how social media platforms are making this shift with new methods of surveillance to monetise user-generated-content and the personal information of users. With platforms such as Google (since 2004), Facebook (since 2012) and Twitter (since 2013) listed on the stock market, they are confronted with the continuous challenge of expanding their user base while also proving they can offer value for advertisers and other third parties. In trying to appeal to both users and investors, what is at stake is transparency, as users and other stakeholders are not made aware of what information exactly is being monetised and how surveillance techniques function in. This potentially undermines a transparent, effective, and trust-inducing interdependent relationship that underlies social media practices.

This contribution seeks to document and compare how the popular social media platforms Google, Facebook and Twitter present themselves to the world in the light of 'corporate surveillance'. By systematically analysing their S-1 forms we will uncover what information is disclosed about user surveillance, and how this is presented to users as well as to potential investors. Employing critical document analysis we investigate how and to what extent these platforms are transparent about their strategies of monitoring, mining and aggregating user data.

Theoretically, this contribution seeks to unpack how we have moved from participatory culture to a form of 'prosumer capitalism'. The first concept celebrates user expression and civic engagement in which prosumers are actively engaging in the production and distribution of content, thus feeling (socially) connected to others. The latter notion points at how the active role of users has resulted in a new form of capitalism, i.e. prosumer capitalism. In the social media era this means that the driving force behind the content shared on these platforms is not corporations such as Google, Facebook or Twitter, but is instead the users themselves. The relevant question then is whether corporate information informs users about their role in value creation, not only the presumption of content but also the social monitoring techniques that are built into these platforms.

Short bios:

Pieter Verdegem, PhD, is assistant professor (Tenure Track) in New Media and Information & Communication Technologies in the Department of Communication Sciences at Ghent University (Belgium). His main research interests are in ICT and society, social media, media & ICT policies and governance. He has published widely on these topics in scholarly journals. Pieter Verdegem lectures New Media Studies (MA programme) and Media Structures and Media Policy (BA programme) in Communication Sciences. He is actively involved in several international networks, amongst other as member of the Management Committee of the COST Action IS0906 Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies.

Shenja van der Graaf, PhD, is a senior researcher and heads the 'Code, Commodification & the City' cluster at iMinds-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium). She is also a researcher at the London School of Economics and Political Science (UK), honorary fellow at MIT Media Lab ID³ Hub (USA), and a Futures of Entertainment fellow (USA). Her current work is concerned with social, economic, and policy issues arising from innovations associated with the ICTs. Specific lines of inquiry include the integration of new technologies into society; management of technological innovation in firms, cities and communities; (new) media users and 'cultures of expertise'; mediation of social and economic life, theoretical perspectives; cyber security, software/code market, legitimate

vulnerability, institutional corruption. Dr. Van der Graaf is a graduate of Utrecht University (MA, 1999) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (PhD, 2009). She was a Fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society (Harvard) and the Research Center for Information Law (University of St. Gallen), a consulting researcher at Convergence Culture Consortium (MIT), an alumna of the Oxford Internet Institute, and worked as consultant for Hakuhodo Inc. in Tokyo.